

ART FROM THE HEART



Story by SSG Alberto Betancourt
Photos by Paul Disney

"The wonderful pieces of artwork, the numerous letters, they all show the children care about us. This really makes us feel very good."

SOLIDARITY spread through American schools as children picked up crayons, paint brushes and pens to convey their sadness, fear, anger and hope following the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks.

Richard Siegesmund, a University of Georgia professor of art education, said children often experience emotions they can't initially put into words, but can express through visual art.

"The colors children use to express themselves through art often can later help them to verbalize what they're feeling," he said.

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One specific piece of artwork that's enhanced with comments and signatures stirs the emotions of SGM Steve Wilson, who works in the Office of the Chief of Chaplains.

"It tugs at my heart every time I walk by it," Wilson said of the 4X10-foot poster created by students at Colorado's Columbine High School. "Here are people from the site of one

national tragedy reaching out to reassure those affected by another national tragedy."

Barbara Grimes, a counselor at Cardinal Forest Elementary School in Springfield, Va., also used the tragedy as a platform to arouse patriotism and encourage students to get involved in community service. It wasn't very hard, she said.

"The emotions the students felt after the terrorist attacks were so overwhelming," she said. "That they were able to do something to express both their sadness and support made them very proud."

Grimes said the children

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began by drawing patriotic artwork on the brown bags that were used to store lunches for rescue workers at the Pentagon during the days after the attack. When she saw the artwork, the idea to make a quilt was born.

"Quilting is my hobby," she said. "I felt the children's artwork needed to be preserved, so we decided to put it on a quilt."

Sixty students from the second through sixth grades participated in the 80-hour project to create the quilt, which is slightly larger than a twin bed. The quilt speaks volumes about the children's feelings, Grimes said.

She and her students are now writing letters to soldiers serving overseas, and around the country the support for the government and the troops continues.

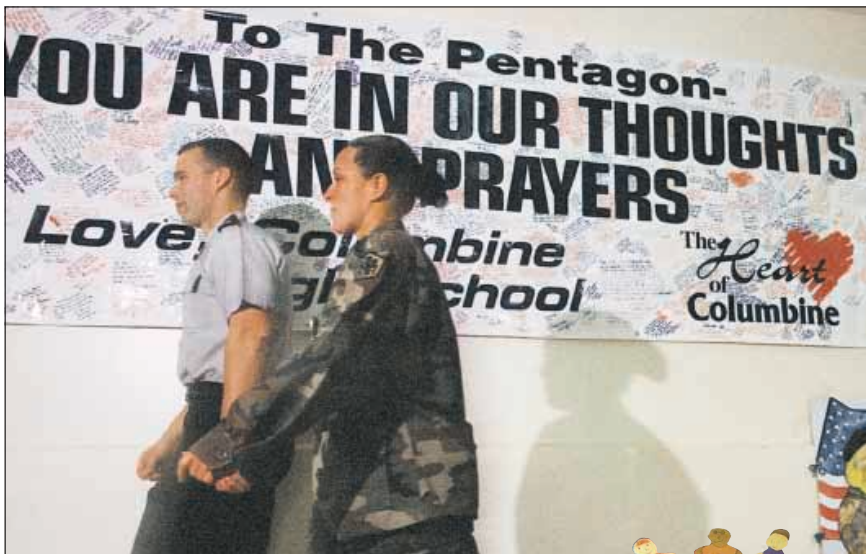
Students from Diamond Elementary School at Fort Stewart, Ga., for example, buried a time capsule with their writings and drawings. And thousands of dollars collected through fundraisers held by America's kids have been donated to relief efforts.

"It's extremely heartening to see the outpouring of support for our country," said June Forte of the Army's Public Inquiry and Analysis Directorate at the Pentagon. "The wonderful pieces of artwork, the numerous letters, they all show the children care about us. This really makes us feel very good." □



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Sixty students participated in the 80-hour project to create the memorial quilt, which is slightly larger than a twin bed.



Of the thousands of posters and other artworks that decorate miles of corridors and hallways inside the Pentagon, perhaps none is as affecting as the 4X10-foot poster created by the students of Colorado's Columbine High School.

